

Most Shia Arabs Oppose Attacks; Islamic State is not Preferred

Shia Arabs in Iraq express relatively little support for attacks against coalition forces like those that occurred Sunday. And while most do express confidence in religious leaders and call for them to play a role in Iraq today, most do not seek a religious theocracy, and very few see Iran as a model for Iraq.

Very few, as well, express support for the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose militia mounted the attacks against the U.S.-led occupation. Eight U.S. soldiers, one Salvadoran and dozens of Iraqis were killed.

As reported previously, anger at the United States peaks among Sunni Arabs, not Shias. According to this national ABC News poll in Iraq, conducted in February, Shias are about 30 points less likely to say the invasion was wrong or to say it humiliated Iraq; and 12 percent of Shias say attacks on coalition forces are acceptable, compared with 38 percent of Sunni Arabs (rising to 71 percent of Sunnis in Anbar province).

Shia Arabs are somewhat less fragmented politically than Iraqis as a whole; 20 percent express support for the Islamic Al-Dawa Party, the oldest Islamic movement in Iraq, which calls for a fundamentalist state. This level of party loyalty is exceeded only among Kurds for either of the two Kurdish parties, the PUK or PDK.

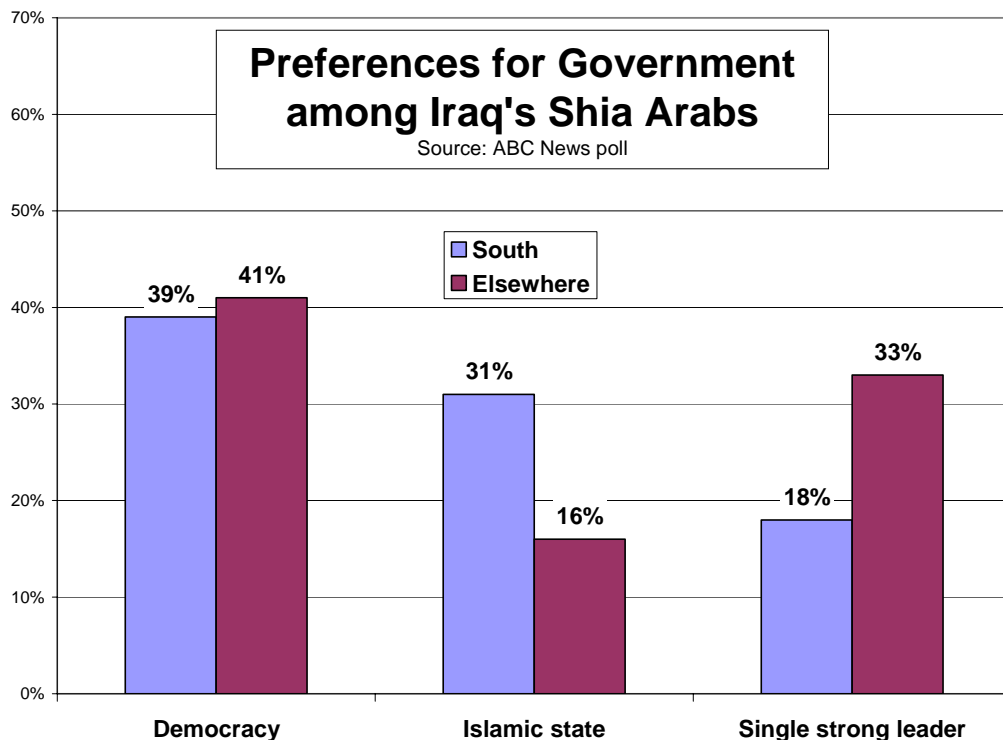
In terms of al-Sadr, a bare one percent of Iraqis name him as the national leader they trust most. On Iran, just three percent name it as a model for Iraq in the coming years, and just four percent say it should play a role in rebuilding Iraq.

GOVERNMENT – Sixty-nine percent of Shias say “a government made up mainly of religious leaders” is something “Iraq needs at this time” (Southern Shias especially say so); that compares with 44 percent of Sunni Arabs. But more Shias say Iraqi needs a democracy or a single strong leader, and about as many say it needs a government of technocrats.

	Shia Arabs	Sunni Arabs
What Iraq needs at this time:		
An Iraqi democracy	91%	76
Single strong leader	83	85
A gov't mainly of religious leaders	69	44
A gov't made up of experts	66	65

Another question asked for a choice among three systems: a strong leader, an Islamic state or a democracy. A plurality of Shias picked a democracy. (Still, more Shias than Sunnis favor a religious theocracy, 26 vs. 15 percent; and again this peaks in the South.)

	Shia Arabs	Sunni Arabs
Preferred system		
Democracy	40%	35
Islamic state	26	15
Single strong leader	23	35



Fifty-two percent of Shia Arabs express confidence in religious leaders, compared with 34 percent of Sunni Arabs. At the same time, about as many Shias express confidence in the new Iraqi army (57 percent), and more in the Iraqi police (69 percent.)

DOWN SOUTH – Shias predominate in the South – 69 percent of Iraqis in the Southern provinces identify themselves as Shia, peaking at 92 percent in Karbala. Looking at it another way, 63 percent of all Iraqi Shias live in the South. (A good number of Muslims declined to specify a doctrine; they tend to match up closely with Shias on a variety of attitudinal questions.)

There are some significant differences between Shia Arabs in the South and those in other regions. Shias in the South are nearly twice as likely as those elsewhere to prefer an Islamic state, 31 to 16 percent; they're also much more apt to say a government mainly of religious leaders is something Iraq needs now. At the same time, Shias in the South – a region heavily repressed under the Saddam regime – are more likely than those elsewhere

to say it was right for the coalition to invade, and to say the invasion liberated rather than humiliated their country.

	Southern Shia Arabs	Shia Arabs elsewhere
U.S.-led invasion was		
Right	56%	44
Wrong	28	47
Invasion:		
Liberated Iraq	49	34
Humiliated Iraq	27	53
What Iraq needs at this time:		
A gov't mainly of religious leaders	79	52
Preferred system		
Democracy	39	41
Islamic state	31	16
Single strong leader	18	33
Confident in religious leaders	57	44

Nearly all Shias in Iraq – 96 percent – also identify themselves as Arabs. Sunnis, by contrast, include both Arabs and members of the Kurdish minority.

METHODOLOGY – This poll was conducted for ABC News, ARD, the BBC and NHK by Oxford Research International of Oxford, England. Interviews were conducted in person, in Arabic and Kurdish, among a random national sample of 2,737 Iraqis age 15 and up from Feb. 9-28, 2004. The results have a two-point error margin.

See previous analyses, full questionnaire and details of the Iraq poll's methodology at ABCNEWS.com, <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>.

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